

Sealawag coast, where the wind was interrupted by the Sealawag hills, the floe was loose and composed of a field of lesser fragments. There was still a general contact—pan lightly touching pan; but many of the pans were of an extent so precariously narrow that their pitching surface could be crossed only on hands and knees, and in imminent peril of being flung off into the gaps of open water.

It was a feat of lusty agility, of delicate, experienced skill, of steadfast courage, to cross the stretches of loose ice, heaving as they were, in the swell of the sea.

Once Tommy Lark slipped when he landed on an inclined pan midway of a patch of water between two greater pans. His feet shot out and he began to slide feet foremost into the sea, with increasing momentum, as a man might fall from a steep, slimy roof. The pan righted in the trough, however, to check his descent over the edge of the ice. When it reached the horizontal in the depths of the trough, and there paused before responding to the lift of the next wave, Tommy Lark caught his feet; and he was set and balanced against the tip and fling of the pan in the other direction as the wave slipped beneath and ran on.

HAVING come, at last, to a doubtful lane sparsely spread with ice, Tommy Lark and Sandy Rowl were halted. They were then not more than half a mile from the rocks of Sealawag. From the substantial ground of a commodious block, with feet spread to brace themselves against the pitch of the pan as a man stands on a heaving deck, they appraised the chances and were disheartened. The lane was like a narrow arm of the sea, extending, as nearly as could be determined in the dusk, far into the floe; and there was an opposite shore—another commodious pan. In the black water of

the arm there floated white blocks of ice. Some were manifestly substantial: a leaping man could pause to rest; but many—necessary pans, these, to a crossing of the lane—were as manifestly incapable of bearing a man up.

AS the pan upon which Tommy Lark and Sandy Rowl stood lay near the edge of the floe, the sea was running up the lane in almost undiminished swells—the long, slow waves of a great ground swell, not a choppy wind-lop, but agitated by the wind and occasionally breaking. It was a thirty-foot sea in the open. In the lane it was somewhat less—not much, however; and the ice in the lane and all round about was heaving in it—tumbled about, rising and falling, the surface all the while at a changing slant from the perpendicular.

Rowl was uneasy.

"What you think, Tommy?" said he. "I don't like t' try it. I 'low we better not."

"We can't turn back."

"No; not very well."

"There's a big pan out there in the middle. If a man could reach that he could choose the path beyond."

"Tis not a big pan."

"Oh, 'tis a fairish sort o' pan."

"Tis not big enough, Tommy."

Tommy Lark, staggering in the motion of the ice, almost off his balance, peered at the pan in the middle of the lane.

"'Twould easily bear a man," said he.

"'Twould never bear two men."

"Maybe not."

"Isn't no 'maybe' about it," Rowl declared. "I'm sure 'twouldn't bear two men."

"No," Tommy Lark agreed. "I 'low 'twouldn't."

"A man would cast hisself away tryin' t' cross on that small ice."

"I 'low he might."

"Well, then," Rowl demanded, "what we goin' t' do?"

"We're goin' t' cross, isn't we?"

"Tis too parlous a footin' on them small cakes."

"Ay; 'twould be ticklish enough if the sea lay flat an' still all the way. An' as 'tis—"

"Tis like leapin' along the side of a steep."

"Wonderful steep on the side o' the seas."

"Too slippery, Tommy. It can't be done. If a man didn't land jus' right he'd shoot off."

"That he would, Sandy!"

"Well?"

"I'll go first, Sandy. I'll start when we lies in the trough. I 'low I can make that big pan in the middle afore the next sea cants it. You watch me, Sandy, an' practise my tactics when you follow. I 'low a ch' r man can cross that lane alive."

"V're in a mess out here!" Sandy Rowl complained. "I wish we hadn't started."

"Tisn't so bad as all that."

"A loud folly!" Rowl growled.

"Ah, well," Tommy Lark replied, "a telegram's a telegram; an' the need o' haste—"

"'Twould have kept well enough."

"Tis not a letter, Sandy."

"Whatever it is, there's no call for two men t' come into peril o' their lives—"

"You never can tell."

"I'd not chance it again for—"

"We isn't drowned yet."

"Yet!" Rowl exclaimed. "No—not yet. We've a minute or so for prayers!"

Tommy Lark laughed.

"I'll get under way now," said he. "I'm not so very much afraid o' failin'."

THERE was no melodrama in the situation. It was a commonplace peril of the coast; it was a reasonable endeavor.

It was thrilling, to be sure—the conjunction of a living peril with the emergency of the message. Yet the dusk and sweeping drizzle of rain, the vanishing lights of Sealawag Harbor, the interruption of the lane of water, the mounting seas, their declivities flecked with a path of treacherous ice, all were familiar realities to Tommy Lark and Sandy Rowl. Moreover, a telegram was not a letter. It was an urgent message. It imposed upon a man's conscience the obligation to speed it. It should be delivered with determined expedition.

Elsewhere, in a rural community, for example, a good neighbor would not hesitate to harness his horse on a similar errand and travel a deep road on a dark night in the fall of the year; nor, with the snow falling thick, would he confront a midnight trudge to his neighbor's house with any louder complaint than a fretful growl.

IT was in this spirit, after all, touched with an intimate solicitude which his love for Elizabeth Lute aroused, that Tommy Lark had undertaken the passage of Sealawag Run. The maid was ill—her message should be sped.

As he paused on the brink of the lane, however, waiting for the ice to lie flat in the trough, poised for the spring to the first pan, a curious apprehension for the safety of Sandy Rowl took hold of him, and he delayed his start.

"Sandy," said he, "you be careful o' yourself."

"I will that!" Sandy declared. He grinned. "You've no need t' warn me, Tommy," he added.

"If aught should go amiss with you," Tommy explained, "'twould be wonderful hard—on Elizabeth."

Sandy Rowl caught the honest truth

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